



John L. Salomone  
Town Manager

# TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET  
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

**MAYOR JEFF WRIGHT**

## MINUTES

### NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

**April 6, 2009**

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at 7:00PM in the Council Chambers of the Newington Town Hall. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

#### Councilors Present

Councilor Banach  
Councilor Boni  
Councilor Bottalico  
Councilor Bowen  
Councilor Cohen  
Councilor Lenares  
Councilor Nagel  
Councilor Nasinnyk  
Mayor Wright

#### Staff Present:

Town Manager John Salomone  
Lori Verreault, Executive Assistant  
Ann Harter, Finance Director

Mayor Wright presented the Town Council's tentative budget for fiscal year 2009-2010. (Presentation attached)

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Barbara Katzman – 5 Eckert Road: Mrs. Katzman stated that the majority party's effort to add \$300,000 to the \$1 million dollar State grant for the downtown revitalization project is the largest amount of "pork" she has seen in a Newington budget and stated that the 5-4 vote to do so was a brazen use of power. She questioned how that vote can be considered legal when no plans were presented to the Council and the \$300,000 did not appear in the Town Manager's proposed budget. She stated that she is outraged that the majority of the Council has voted to add \$300,000 to the budget when so many employees were asked to forgo a raise this year. She stated that it is deceitful and unfeeling to do so. Mrs. Katzman commented that any improvements to the Market Square parking lots an amenity that will make parking easier, but it will always be just a parking lot and will never become the type of attraction hinted at by some of the Councilors. She stated that the schools, parks, Library, adult education and sports programs are the amenities that bring people and businesses to Town. She stated that she hopes other citizens will join her to call for the removal of the \$300,000 from the budget, and urged the majority party to prove to the citizens that they mean it when they said they were going to remove the fat from the budget. She stated doing otherwise means that their words mean nothing.

Michael J. Fox, 1901 Main Street: Mr. Fox stated that the \$300,000 was taken from the people and urged the Council to use the money for anything except the parking lot project. He urged the Council to determine what can be done with the \$1,000,000 grant and to then proceed with the project in phases as necessary.

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Gary Bolles, 28 Burdon Lane: Mr. Bolles stated opposition to using \$300,000 from the CIP budget towards the parking lot and remarked that the \$1 million grant should be sufficient for the project, especially given these economic times. He noted the Republican Party's campaign promises and remarked that in looking at the assessor's database as to who owns the properties around the lot and their political affiliations it would appear that this \$300,000 is a bailout and a gift to a special interest group. He noted that in the 2007 elections the voters showed what can happen if they are not happy – they vote people out. Mr. Bolles commented that this is politics at its absolute worst and stated that the funds need to remain in the CIP for other projects, particularly the Town Hall, which is falling apart.

Steve Woods, 94 New Britain Avenue, Board of Education Member: Mr. Woods asked the Council to follow Councilors' Banach, Bowen, Cohen and Nasinnyk's idea to restore the \$300,000 into the NHS school code compliance project fund. He stated that this project needs to be done and noted that the State matches \$0.55 for every \$1.00 spent on the project. He remarked that the Town is not going to find a better return on an investment than the 55% reimbursement offered by the State. Mr. Woods stated that the parking lot can be repaired for \$1.8 million, but spending the money on the project does not address everything that needs to be done throughout Town.

Lyn Connery, 225 Robbins Avenue: Ms. Connery stated that the \$1 million should be sufficient to complete the parking lot project and agreed with other speakers that the \$300,000 is not necessary to the project. She indicated that the Chair of the Downtown Revitalization Committee had indicated that the \$1 million would be the extent of the funding for the project. She inquired where a chain restaurant would fit in the existing buildings. She stated that the Council is rushing the issue and remarked that the \$300,000 is better spent elsewhere.

Glen Leghorn, 33 Basswood Street: The speaker thanked the Councilors and Board of Educations members for their hard work and indicated that having served on a few small boards and commissions he has a lot of respect for the work of the volunteers that make up the Council and the Board. He expressed appreciation to the Mayor for securing the \$1 million dollar grant from the State for the downtown revitalization project; however he stated that he has an issue with allocating the additional \$300,000 in funds for the project. The speaker indicated that his wife works for the Town and has agreed to forgo a wage increase this year because it is the right thing to do. He stated that he does not understand the logic of adding \$300,000 to improve something that the Assessor's database calls a "municipal parking lot". He stated that beautifying the Town is a good thing but urged the Council to make sound, justifiable decisions. He cautioned the Council to be very careful with the scope of the project, indicating that if the area contains a children's area it can lead to more liability for the Town. He stated that the \$300,000 should go elsewhere in the budget.

Judy Igielski, 23 Old Musket Drive: Ms. Igielski noted while trying to thank the Councilors at the last meeting she was asked to wrap up her remarks. She thanked the Councilors that attended the recent focus group meeting and expressed disappointment that the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Majority Leader did not attend. She stated that she wrote a letter to the Newington Town Crier but it did not make it to the paper in time for publication. She thanked residents who signed up to speak at the last meeting, especially the children and stated that she wishes that everyone's voice could have been heard. Ms. Igielski inquired when the photo of the senior housing shown in the Mayor's presentation was taken and remarked that it looks like it may have been taken in the 1970s. She stated that the proposed studies to find efficiencies between the Town and the Board are a great idea but remarked that \$50,000 is a lot of money and recommended that the Council draw on previous studies for information. She indicated that she is not happy with the \$300,000 going toward the parking lot project and stated that it should be put towards school code compliance updates. She noted that funding for air conditioning at the high school has been cut and indicated that air conditioning is very helpful for students and teachers with various health problems. She thanked the Councilors for their time and effort.

Robert Briggaman, 75 Groveland Terrace; Mr. Briggaman thanked the Council for the proposed 2.6% mill rate increase and noted that it is the second year that this Council has kept the increase below three-percent. He stated that it has proved the naysayers wrong and expressed disappointment that other employee groups did not make the same sacrifice as the AFSCME members have for the upcoming year. He suggested that a check box be added to tax bills that would allow taxpayers to pay a certain amount to the Board of Education. Mr. Briggaman thanked the Council for its hard work and long hours put into the budget.

Bernadette Conway, 177 Hartford Avenue: Mrs. Conway thanked the Board and Council for their hard work and stated support for the Board's proposed three-percent budget increase. She expressed concern for spending \$300,000 on the parking lot project. She stated that even with plans for a green and a gazebo it's still a parking lot and she stated that she does not want the Town green to be in the middle of a parking lot. She stated that

the \$1 million already allocated to the project is enough and stated that she is against spending the additional \$300,000.

Peter Arburrr, 133 Tremont Street Mr. Arburrr noted that he had expressed concern with using \$2,000,000 in surplus funds towards this year's budget and cautioned that there would not be any surplus left for future years. He noted the State budget session and beliefs that the State will be in the full throes of the recession for the next budget session and he recommended leaving \$700,000 in the reserves to use in the 2010-2011 budget. Mr. Arburrr noted that he is former Town Engineer and cautioned the Council to look at the big picture. He recommended placing \$400,000 plus the \$300,000 allocated for the parking lot renovations back into the reserves for next year. He stated that projects can be done in phases and suggested doing the parking lot renovation in phases until it is completed. Mr. Arburrr remarked that it would likely be a long shot to have a change made to the proposed budget and remarked that he cannot recall seeing such a change take place in the past.

Dario Anastasio, 20 Strawberry Lane: Mr. Anastasio commented that he attended his first Town Council meeting the prior week and stated that it is interesting to see how the process has evolved. He remarked that he was dismayed to watch the majority of the Council rubber stamp everything the Mayor wanted without listening to the opposition's arguments. He suggested that the Town determine what can be done with the \$1 million parking lot grant prior to spending the additional \$300,000 and stated that it is foolish to spend an additional \$300,000 to build a park with Mill Pond Park nearby. Mr. Anastasio noted that he recently switched to the Republican Party because he felt that it is more judicious in spending, but remarked that he is against spending the money on the parking lot.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: Ms. Lyons first read a written statement from Sandy Lallier of 27 Elton Drive in which Mrs. Lallier remarked that as a mother she looks at every dollar her family spends and saves and stated that the Town's leaders should do the same. She stated that the Town should save all of the money that it can right now and that patience and prudence should prevail.

Ms. Lyons then made her own remarks. She inquired when the Downtown Revitalization Committee meets and stated that the information does not appear on the Town's website. She stated that the Committee was not in on the decision to spend the additional \$300,000 on the parking lot project. Ms. Lyons stated that has walked and driven through the area and inquired as to why the Town has allowed it to deteriorate. Ms. Lyons stated that downtown revitalization is great, but questioned whether the Town needs to spend an additional \$300,000 on the project.

Clark Castelle, 167 Connecticut Avenue: Mr. Castelle stated that he is normally very supportive of revitalization and stated that the downtown area is the cultural axis of many communities. He remarked, however, that he can only view it as unconscionable to add \$300,000 to a \$1 million dollar project in this precarious economy especially when there are so many other important projects that need funding. He stated that it is not appropriate to allocate the money now, before the Council has received revised project plans and before the Committee and the community have had the chance to digest the project. Ms. Castelle stated that one of the biggest problems in the area is with litter, and stated that twenty volunteers teamed with area property owners could clean up the lot without spending a dime.

Bob Stanley, 323 Hillcrest Avenue: Mr. Stanley remarked that what some people may consider as "fat" may be important to others. He stated that Newington is a good Town and has been for a long time. He stated that this is due to many factors, particularly good governance when times are tough. He stated that good governance involves listening to the people and stated that Newington has a representative form of government with an administrative staff to carry out the policies set by the Council. Mr. Stanley stated that when times are tough people can't be afraid to give back. He remarked that he has felt that Newington is an excellent Town to date, due to the sum of its parts.

Maureen Klett, 104 Harold Drive: Mrs. Klett stated that she is not opposed to spending an additional \$300,000 to improve the parking lot, but stated that she is opposed to spending an additional \$300,000 on the parking lot while a large group of Town employees are to go without a raise this year in order to save the Town money. She remarked that doing so is like putting asphalt before people. Mrs. Klett stated that in regards to the \$50,000 allocated towards consolidation studies she has learned that the results of these studies can depend on who is paying for the study and inquired whether the Council and the Board are splitting the costs of the study. She noted that the Council and the Board had discussed sitting down to discuss ideas for streamlining operations and stated that spending the \$50,000 may be a waste. Mrs. Klett spoke about an article in the Hartford Courant entitled "DSS: You're in New Britain Even if You're Not" in which it was reported that the Department of Social

Services recently moved its welfare center from downtown New Britain to just over the Town line in on Christian Lane in Newington, but with a New Britain address created for the site. Mrs. Klett read from the article "the story is told in public documents. This one surfaces in an e-mail last Oct. 29 from one of the new landlords, David Occhialini, to Mayor Jeffrey Wright of the Town of Newington. "Can you please confirm with the Town Manager that you have no objection with the State addressing the 30 Christian Lane property as New Britain?" Occhialini wrote. "As we discussed, they are trying to avoid the 'perception' that they have relocated the New Britain office to Newington." Wright immediately e-mailed the Newington Town Manager, John Salomone, saying that Occhialini's "new tenant is the Dept. of Social Services, which is moving from New Britain. As a result, he is running into some political winds on the move. He would like the mailing address of the building to reflect a New Britain address and he has already cleared it with the Postal Service." "He wanted to check to see if we have an objection, understanding the building is still technically in Newington and [he will] continue to pay Newington taxes," Wright wrote. Wright later e-mailed Occhialini to say he spoke to Salomone, and "you are all set to move forward as discussed."

Mark Pappa, 105 Back Lane: Mr. Pappa stated that he has been disappointed in all of the commentary against the downtown revitalization project. He stated that it is more than just asphalt, it is a project that will be of tremendous benefit to the Town. He applauded the AFSCME union for their sacrifices and for being part of the solution. He stated that the Council's foresight should be applauded, not criticized and stated that it is important that the Town comes together in times like these.

Michael Gallon, 43 Cheney Lane: Mr. Gallon thanked the Mayor, the Councilors and anyone who volunteers for the Town. He cautioned people not to lose sight of the significance of the downtown revitalization project. He also cautioned people not to make such a large issue of the \$300,000 as it represents only one-quarter of one percent of the budget. He stated that the parking lot is falling apart and is dangerous and to improve the lot is to invest in the Town's center. Mr. Gallon remarked that there is something to be said for attracting private capital and stated that the project will cause people to at least consider coming to the center. He urged people not to make this a political issue, and noted that the biggest topic of conversation about the \$94,000,000 budget has been this \$300,000 item. He stated that he is in favor of allocating the \$300,000 for the downtown revitalization project.

Hillary Cayer, 66 Elton Drive: Ms. Cayer stated that she agrees that downtown revitalization is important. She stated, however, that prior to spending the \$300,000 the Committee should see what can be done with the \$1 million grant first, and then phase in the rest of the project.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Seeing no further remarks from the public Mayor Wright closed the Public Hearing at 8:18pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mrs. Jaime Trevethan  
Clerk of the Council